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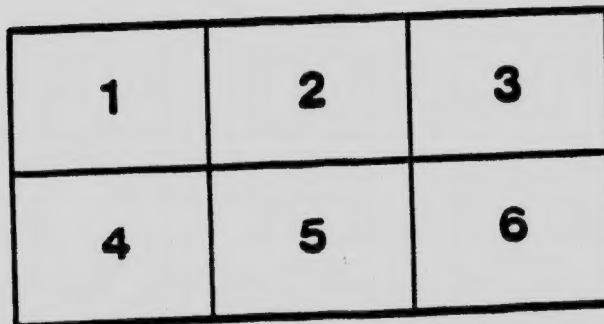
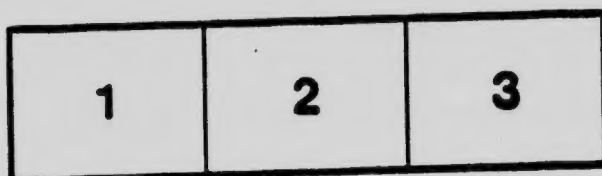
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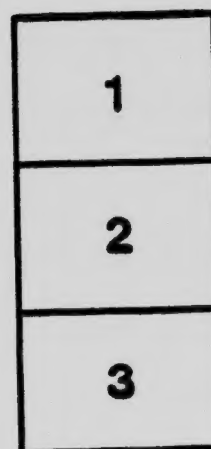
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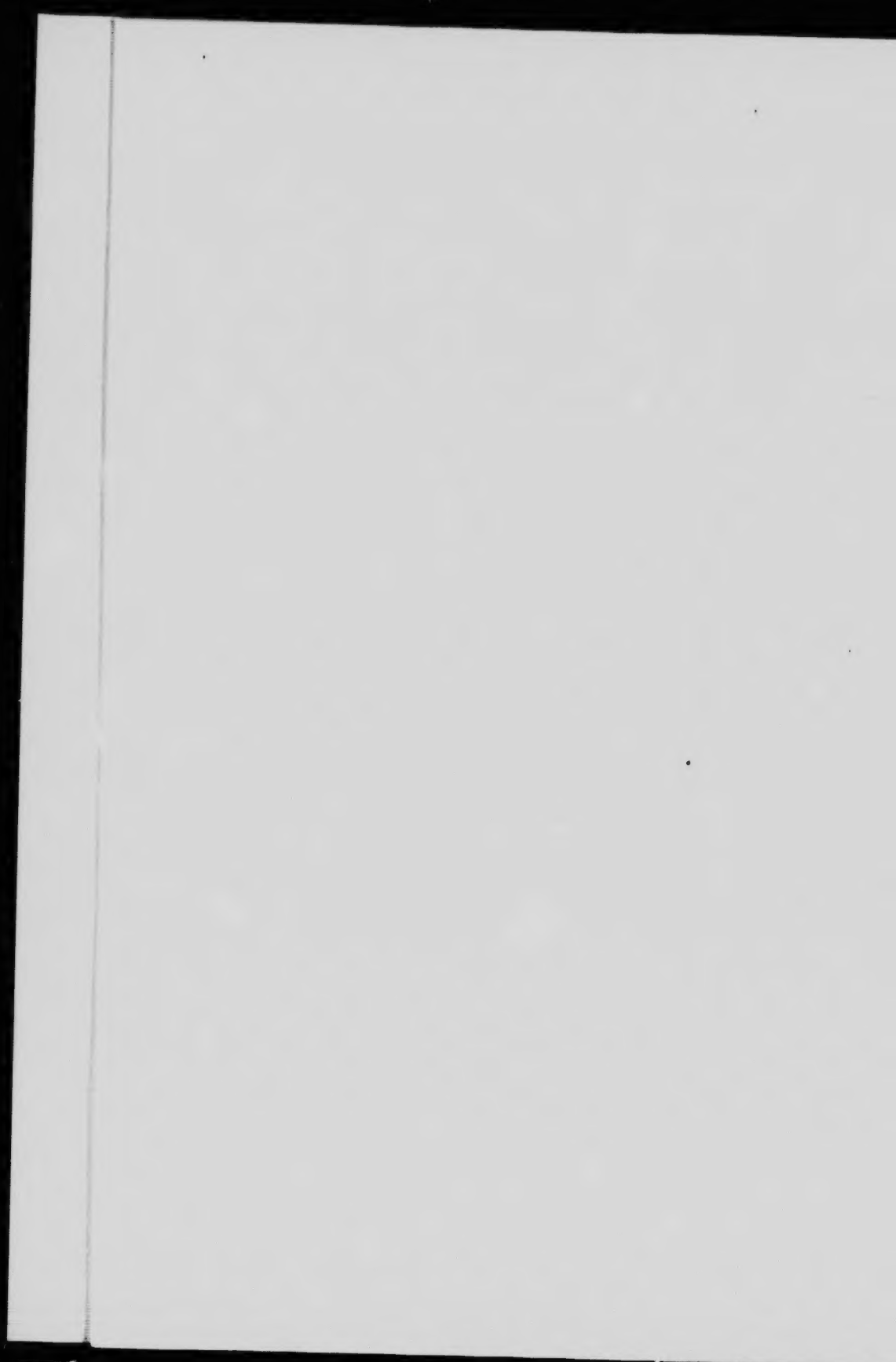
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Sunshine-Shadder



BY

Jean Mitchell Smith



TORONTO:
WILLIAM BRIGGS
1911

PS8487

MSS

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IN MEMORY
WILLIAM STEWART SMITH
A LABORER IN THE
MASTER'S VINEYARD



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CHAPTER I.

THE WAY—THE PLACE—THE PEOPLE.

SUNSHINE-SHADDER marked but a tiny dot upon the provincial chart as it snuggled inland some thirty miles from the little gridironed town of Kinglyville.

The latter was the capital town of the county, and besides enjoying this distinction it had, by diplomatic usage of its municipal importance, coaxed activity within its limits till the whistle of the mill factory and train rolled discordantly for many miles around.

Sunshine-Shadder, the tiny sister slumbering in the interior, was too remote to be awakened by the sounds thereof, but was nevertheless aware of the bold strides of the sister town which had no time or favors to bestow upon the tiny toddler, whose only medium of transit with the busy beyond took the form of an old tumble-down stage which rattled into Kinglyville once each week.

Stage passengers were few, yet people are wont to travel over all portions of the globe, and several were known to drop off the train at Kinglyville during each year and make enquiries as to the closest connection for Sunshine-Shadder.

If the traveller's arrival happened a day too early or too late for the weekly stage the equilibrium of comfortable anticipation was considerably jarred, for

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information invariably simmered down to a curt sentence naming stage day, with the addition of a proviso in which the words "hoof" or "jolt" figured conspicuously.

The latter was a mode of procedure which usually scurried clouds across the stranger's face to such an extent that they were scarcely dispelled even when the "Ask-me" individual, noting his perplexity, pierced his ear in the Kinglyville vernacular:

"Mebbe ye want ter know the way ter Sunshine-Shadder?"

A reply in the affirmative brought forth a grunt of approval from the interested Kinglyvilleite, who screwed his observers into an inquisitive stare, and between expectorations of nicotine volunteered the following key:

"Wall, jes' hike it along this street then, till ye strikes at the cemetery lot be the end o' the town, 'n' as ye sight Marthy Jones' block o' stone close ter the fence, tern ter the right. Tin rocky mile is for-nist ye neow till ye come ter Billy Bell's red barn be the fit o' the hill, 'n' theer, jes' close yer eye ter the right 'n' doe-se-doe ter the left. A tin 'n' a five good scriptur' measure will bring ye as quick as yer feet or the nag's a willin' ter Jamsey Smith spruce 'n' pine bush, 'n' theer, wheer the ole mill is tumlin' down, tern onct more ter the left. Jes' five mile neow till ye strikes at Butternut Grove, 'n' onct over the corduroy; mak' it easy, go steady, clear ter the right. A few yards more, wheel quick around the tern, 'n' snuggin' good yer rein, down the hill ye go, 'n' mak'

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yer bow ter the durnest, forsakin'st hill, which ole Colonel Smith christined Sunshine-Shadder."

Once the stranger had, either on foot or in conveyance, followed the injunctions given and found himself around the turn and jogging down the zig-zag hill, his eye focused in one glance a hit-and-miss collection of habitations known to the interested as Sunshine-Shadder.

They appeared a mere handful as they clung to the hill or fringed its base, and although a few homes of fancy frame were wont to rear their heads at irregular intervals, the unabashed white-washed logs outnumbered the former and characterized the village by a helplessness pitiably infantine.

Its accession to village importance had been its one step in the line of progression, an accomplishment fraught with so little result that all other attempts to advance had dwindled into the insignificance of hopeless abandonment.

Old Colonel Smith, who had limped back from one of the early Canadian skirmishes minus a leg but plus a pension, had named the irregular acreage Sunshine-Shadder. From his home on the tree-topped hill he had given it this name as he watched the sinking sun cast its fantastic shadows over the hillside and valley where dwelt the new settlers into whose lives there were mingled the sunshine and shadow of a new home-land.

Tucked away in the interior their progress had been retarded from the beginning, and when the hope gradually faded that the bed of steel would reach

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the hillside a number of the settlers on whom a showing of prosperity had smiled flitted nearer the front. The few whose worldly possessions or inclinations would not permit removal clung to their holdings, and through time's softening influence they gradually settled down to the fact that they had at least their bread and butter and a weekly mail to bolster up their fallen hopes.

The latter was the chief event in their mundane existence, and very few missed mail night in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the one hillside store, from the verandah of which swung a weather-beaten sign bearing the significant fact that Limpold Beggs, postmaster and general merchant, waited within.

Sunshine-Shadder for brevity sake had stigmatized him "Limpy," an appellation which could easily apply to his unfortunate possession of a peg-leg, an incumbrance which did not, however, hinder him in the race of local enterprise.

As postmaster his position was far from being onerous, for mail left but once during the week, the round trip being made to Kinglyville in one day by Billy Batterson, a citizen who ranked next to Limpy in acknowledged good fellowship. His return signalized a red-letter night on the hill and heralded a rush to the general store, where its proprietor stumped energetically to and fro, as he sorted the letters and papers, which he dealt out carefully to the expectant crowd.

The budget was seldom heavy, and many who rounded up for mail often found the anticipation

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more pleasant than the realization. Yet the excitement produced was something in itself, and they either wended their way home or lounged from the wicket to the seatable commodities scattered about.

Once the little wicket shutter was drawn, Limpy stumped towards the group and added a very necessary spice to the remarks and discussions which arose once the pros and cons of weekly topics were introduced for consideration.

Billy Batterson usually joined the circle and, perched upon a keg or box, related between puffs from his corn-cob the "doin's up ter Kinglyville."

The store had long been the rendezvous of Sunshine-Shadder; in fact, ever since prohibition had swayed the population, sweeping away all evidence of John Barleycorn, who had demonstrated for years at the wayside inn which stood directly opposite the general store. It was old and disgruntled, it still continued to offer a poor shelter, but few in Sunshine-Shadder contributed their presence, preferring to shake the dust off their boots on Limpy's floor.

In addition to the store and inn, the hillside boasted a popular Sunday resort. It towered half-way up the hillside, and on the seventh day rhythmic waves of sound floated from its belfry over the hillside and valley. Within its red-brick walls, Rev. Doctor Peter Paul drilled his hearers upon the doctrine of the Presbyterian Church. Near and far loved this man, who had given the best of his years to Sunshine-Shadder, laughing with them in their joys and comforting or relieving them in sorrow or pain.

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In their little work-a-day world they sometimes forgot there was a busier beyond as they labored over the dark brown earth sowing and reaping to the key of contentment blest with health, and although it was a life with sometimes slow reward, it was more or less softened by the sweets of domesticity, comradeship and hospitality.

Busy in the up-keep of their humble holdings, Sunshine-Shadder seldom pondered upon the fretful thought of what might have been, but accepting the situation with the best possible grace, they were always ready to solace the less optimistic with the fact that though remote from the busy centres they had at least the tiny satisfaction of beholding the name of their village in conspicuous type on the provincial chart. It was a slight recognition, but it swelled many a bosom with conscious pride, and especially was this the fact when they gazed, many of them with spectacled eyes, at the time-worn chart in the old stone school. Down the years, before this medium of intelligence, lad and lass have toed the chalked line, invariably receiving as their first lesson in geography the location of Sunshine-Shadder.

It was an eventful occasion to the country boy or girl as they shuffled barefooted from the visible line and, with pointer in hand, tremblingly stabbed a spot which was announced almost immediately by the chorus shout of "Sunshine-Shadder."

Years after, when many of those who toed that chalked line flitted to other lands, it was seldom that they allowed the opportunity to pass without inform-

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ing the inquisitive that Sunshine-Shadder, the home of their birth, snuggled inland some thirty miles from Kinglyville, where once each year the roots, fruits and vegetables of the hillside were taken for worthy exhibition.

"Breathes there a man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
'This is my own, my native land.'"

CHAPTER II.

SOME LOCAL NEWS AND THE STORY OF A WIND-STORM.

It was a balmy spring evening and the door of the general store was open. From within came the sound of voices, and the occasional peals of laughter told the passerby that Jamsey Pompey and Billy Parker were among the number.

Spring had made its appearance early that season, and the revival of life stirred the countryside to a renewal of the usual preparations. Limpy, too, had received an impetus as he watched the snow slip from the hillside, and caught the odor of the resinous buds and sappy trees. New commodities had been added to his varied stock and ranged in tempting array, from grains and garden seeds to webs of shirting and gingham. Customers called daily and were beamed upon whether they came to shop or just "dropped in," and it was seldom when mail night came round that the over-plus of duties in seed-time or harvest crowded out their visit to the store.

The clock on top of the spool cabinet near the door struck eight before Billy Batterson arrived that evening with the mail from Kinglyville. The budget was unusually heavy, and before the hillsider had received his weekly paper and the few letters which fell to

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his share the minutes had flown round to nine. But Limpy was seldom known to close up with the distribution of mail, and as they adjourned from the wicket that night to the seatable commodities scattered about each looked eagerly forward to the few minutes' chat "after mail."

Billy Batterson's appearance was hailed with delight, and he had hardly touched a match to his corn-cob before conversation was centred upon him.

"Seems ter me, some o' ye fellers will be tenderin' for mail drawin' nex' season, fer I'll be blest if them durn cord'roys won't be the death o' me yet," he growled dejectedly as he straddled a vinegar keg.

"I see there be a article in the *Advocate* on good roads," remarked Billy Parker, "but it's one thing to siggest 'n' another thing to ack."

"Right ye be," commented Billy. "Why, if that ole Snip o' mine had decent roads ter leg it on, we would be ter Kinglyville 'n' back in no time; but as 'tis, the nag's either a stumlin' or cloggin' her hoofs the hull way theer 'n' back."

"Mech doin' up theer ter-day?" inquired Jack Lane from the region of the spool cabinet.

"Jes' same usual, save that they've started vineer in' the big hotel, 'n' some of the folks air talkin' local option; 'n' neow as I cum ter think on it, Jack, I seed Albert Edaard's Danny, sittin' 'crost from me in the res'tiran' at noon. He was astin' fer ye all, 'n' sed ter tell yous folks he'd a good job in the shingle mill; spec's his ma will be up the ferst cheap trip ter Kinglyville, 'n' drive out ter your place."

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"Wall, neow, I'm r al glad ye seed Danny. We hain't laid eyes on him sin' las' fair, 'n' ye may be sure the folks will be right glad that Aunt Minay be goin' ter pay a visit."

"Seems like yesterday since Albert Edaard 'n' Minay wus keepin' company," Limpy remarked as he absently turned the pages of a new seed catalogue.

"No more'n it does," chuckled old Tommy Stead, as he slowly edged his box from its obscurity behind the stove. "'N' Minay got a bargain when she hitched on ter Albert Edaard," he added, significantly.

"I mind's well the day they wus marrit, Jack," exclaimed Billy Batterson. "It wus the day afore the big wind storm. You'll relloc' that tew, Limpy, fer me 'n' you had been up ter the barn raisin' bee at Willum Jones, 'n' we left theer nex' mornin' about five 'n' driv' over ter second line ter get Shamus O'Brien 'n' his brother Ned ter sell the roan team. We hed jes' got inter the house ter have a snack when the clouds as hed been lowry lookin' 'n' black spurted rain like mad. Then a few minutes arter they wus pelting hail like plums"—

"'Member that day, long as I live," interposed Limpy, as he tossed the catalogue aside. "I'll never forget it, no, nor ye, Billy, fer, fellers, the clouds suddenly got riled up more'n 'n' more'n, 'n' pitched over each other, 'n' kinder raged roun' ter keep time ter the thunner 'n' lighterin'; 'n' I kin tell ye it lightered the wust I ever seed, for onct when Shamey's darter was liftin' the taters from the pot, the fork

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was jerked clean outern her han', 'n' mos' shocked the life outern her"—

"'N' then, to make matters more interestin'," interrupted Billy, "the wind rose high, 'n' a few minutes later when Shamey's darter wus comin' ter herself, the lighterin' ripped a gol' darn hole in the floor side o' Granny O'Brien, who hed rheumatiz fer years 'n' cudn't stir; 'n' o' all that's onnateral, she suddintly stud up, 'n' sez she ter the darter, 'Get me my linsey-woolsey dress 'n' velvet bunnit, fer I'm goin' ter mass soon as it's fair."

"You feller's talkin' o' that day makes me shivery down the column," ventured Tommy Stead as he straightened up and surveyed the group. "You can titter, Jamsey Pompey, fer ye know nothin' o' it; fer I wus eatin' dinner that day at my missus' folks on ninth concession, when the sturm was suddintly set aside by the wind. We hed jes' been marrit three weeks, 'n' nothin' do the woman but we trot over to the ole folks. Wall, it wur a day; fer we hed jes commenced ter et when the wind riz up, the apple trees in the orchard swayed clean ter break, 'n' the little plum tree that mother-in-law set a sight o' store by smashed clean through the windy pane. The ole lady wus a pourin' tea at the time, 'n' she dropped the pot 'n' made fer the windy. The whole house shook, kinder earthquake 'sperience; 'n' fellers, true as I'm here, the nex' I knowed wus when I cum tew, a-feelin' someone knockin' me on the back; 'n' sure as ye live, theer wus mother-in-law 'n' me wedged in twixt the wood-box 'n' the cookin' stove; 'n' if it

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hedn't o' been fer father 'n' Sam Thompson, the hired man, who had been swillin' pigs at the barn, we might o' been burnt ter a crisp, fer close by us was the coals from the stove a-burnin' everything in sight, 'n' mos' likely the house, which had terned consid'bly fer the back medder. Annabella, thet's my woman, wus found acrost from us in a dead faint, 'n' it wus weeks afore she got her balance back—"

"Say, Tommy," drawled Jamsey Pompey, "warn't that the day I heerd pa tell on, as how old man Stubbs on ninth concession had the roof blowed offen the top o' his little log house?"

"The very same-set day, Jamsey, the very same-set day, 'n' yer pa will mind how the apple tree in Pete Burr's orchard was rooted clean up and carried over 'n' dropped kerplunk in ole man Stubbs' kitchen. Ole man Stubbs was a hillin' corn behind the house at the time, 'n' ferst thing he knowed wus when he found hisself a-flying through the air, 'n' landed, hoe 'n' all, in the snowberry bush in ole maid Corney's yard on eighth concession. When he cum tew, so tew speak, wus when the wust part o' the sturm wus over, 'n' ole maid Corney, who had been hidin' in the cellar, suddintly poked her head through the cellar windy, 'n' shouted, 'Be that you, Stubbs?' 'N' Stubbs, who hed hed a sneakin' regard for Corney for some years, gasped, bewildered like, 'Yes, Corney, it's what be left o' me, 'n' if ye don't give me a heft out o' this here bush I won't have yer taters hoed 'fore fall.' An' she did, 'n' Stubbs stayed on."

"Yes, fellers, that's exactly how Corney got ole

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Stubbs," declared Limpy. "So you see, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good." he added mirthfully, as he rose from his seat and closed up the damper of the box stove in a suggestive "go home" manner, which the boys immediately acted upon.

CHAPTER III.

BENJAMIN WILLIAM BRIGHT.

WHEN the villagers looked from their windows and rested their eyes upon a tall, white-haired man, erect to severity, in a suit of rusty black, they invariably exclaimed:

"Well, I never; if it ain't ole Beniman Willum Bright?"

Generally once a month, implemented by a cane in one hand and a market basket in the other, he bent his steps over the uneven plank walk to the general store.

His appearance always excited an exclamation, for, although numbered among the inhabitants, he seldom mingled in their life. In fact, he lived so entirely apart and so apparently unconscious of his neighbors on the hillside and in the valley that as the years went by the uncharitably inclined summed up this exclusiveness in declarations which marked Benjamin as "simple," "queer," or "crazy."

It was several years before his hair had turned from a brown to a silver white that he had wandered to the hillside. Travel-stained and weary he had stumbled into the general store one night in early spring, and depositing his possessions, a cane and a

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bag of clothing, on the floor, had dropped wearily beside them.

The Oriental carving on the cane and the silver head which glistened with the monogram, "B.W.B.," had excited the wonder of the group almost as much as the new arrival, whose reserve was tantalizing to the frank, free souls of Sunshine-Shadder.

He had come to stay, and a few days later staked his claim. There was land in the valley to spare, but, stealing up to the hill-top, he chose a location amid the grandeur of ages where, after a few months' labor, a tiny three-roomed house of logs surprised the view. Surrounded by a forest of maple, spruce and pine, the thin blue curl from the stove-pipe chimney was barely visible to the valley eye. In time a clearing of several acres stretched to view, and the tall, gaunt man who had wrought the transformation was silently proud of his endeavour. The coal-like orbs which radiated a halo over the thin brown beardless face spoke volumes in luminous anticipation as year in and year out he busily cleared, planted and sold his gleanings.

Down below the settlers who toiled more advantageously were heard to remark that "Beniman Willum Bright wus doin' well."

In fact, Limpy was the first to set this idea afloat by emphatic grunts and knowing nods when the weight of Benjamin's purse was commented upon. Two and two were put together, and as multiplication exceeds subtraction in such a case, Benjamin was rated as a man of means. The observant readily con-

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firmed this supposition, for the ever watchful had noticed the frequent receipts from the savings bank pass from the wicket into his muscular, horny hands.

It was the sum and substance of their gleanings, however, and even Limpy, who knew the history of every man and woman on the hillside, admitted that when it came to the hill-top he was "flabbergasted." Outwardly indifferent to private or public opinion, Benjamin's attitude towards the villagers remained almost as reserved as upon his entry among them. Even upon the rare evenings when he dropped into the genial atmosphere of the store, his tongue touched alone upon the most commonplace topics of the countryside. They all felt he could tell a story, a story of a different life beyond the hillside, and it was with eagerness that they discussed and exaggerated upon the slightest remark made by this man whose name alone they knew.

Only upon one occasion could they remember that he fairly loosened his tongue to indulge in other than the gossip of the neighborhood. It was an unexpected procedure, and the night that he so forgot himself as to contradict an assertion touching upon the pleasures of a city life was a night that lived long in the memory of his hearers. For once utterly forgetful of self, he propped his cane between his knees and pictured in rich but simple language the sunshine and shadow of city life as they had never heard it before. The hour grew late, but regardless of this they clustered round, a silent group who feared to stir lest the slightest inattention would break the spell upon him.

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With the passing of the years his visits to the hillside became less frequent, and the day at length arrived when his presence excited the general exclamation:

"Well, I never; if it ain't ole Beniman Willum Bright!"

It was the hermit of the hill-top, but leaning more heavily upon his cane. His objective point was the general store, where the contents of his time-worn basket were exchanged for the simplest necessities of life. Limpy always had a ready welcome for him, and once his order had been packed in the basket, along with several back-date weeklies, he was regularly conducted to the little office, where he was regaled on seed cake and native wine before he retraced his steps up the hill. At his door the villager often paused and talked to him as he labored over his neat garden patch or sat beside the open fire. Sometimes he had but an absent welcome for them, but as a rule they rarely took their departure without having spent several hours, during which he talked enthusiastically of the great projects in store for Sunshine-Shadder once the water power of Kinglyville was coaxed to the hillside. It was a manifold scheme of his second childhood and usually ended abruptly, for the weary caller was wont to tear himself away, leaving Benjamin alone to think out this castle in the air.

A time came when Sunshine-Shadder saw him no more among them. The children wondered, but the older realized that Benjamin's sun was dipping slowly

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in the west. To the lonely man, accustomed to ceaseless activity for years, the days were long and weary, but days during which he was not forgotten, for the ready hands of many of the women on the hillside and in the valley brightened and freshened his home as the weeks went by. Limpy, too, never failed to climb the elevation on a Sunday afternoon and carried, with the aid of Billy Batterson, a basket for the old man's needs. To the nightly group they had little to say regarding him save that he was not as he "uster be," and from that remark it floated round that "Beniman Willum Bright wus well-nigh tuckered out."

It was on a Sunday early in May that Limpy entered the hill-top house and found the chair beside the fireless grate vacated. The door of the tiny sleeping-room was slightly ajar, and as he crossed its threshold he brushed a tear from his eye. Benjamin lay upon his bed. An old tattered copy of the New Testament was on the patchwork quilt beside him, and outstretched as if to grasp it was the lifeless, roughened hand which would never turn its dog-eared pages again.

Benjamin William Bright was dead.

A lonely funeral wended its way from the rustic home just two days later. In the little procession it was noticed that Limpy Beggs followed his old-time friend, supporting himself by a cane with a silver head.

After the simple service in the red brick church they wended their way up the hill again, and under

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a wide old elm whose branches brushed the cottage roof, they laid him to rest amid the scenes he had loved so well. On the following Sabbath, Peter Paul, who had quietly and lovingly ministered to him, spoke at length of this man who had lived so quietly among them. It was a simply eulogy, and as he concluded many eyes opened wide with astonishment when it was known that Benjamin William Bright had once been known as the prodigal son of a belted earl.

His little worldly store of some three thousand was to be divided equally between Limpy Beggs and Peter Paul, save for the reservation of one thousand for the purchase of a public library to cover the walls of the front room of the rustic cottage, which was to be hereafter known as the "Sunshine-Shadder Library."

Before the summer had slipped away the mound on the hill-top was carpeted in green and the syringa that blossomed beside the cottage door was planted at its head. That season and for many to come Limpy Beggs would sit by the hour of a Sunday afternoon under the sheltering elm, and resting his eyes on the plain white granite block, half absently repeat the following inscription:

" Benjamin William Bright,
A man we knew and liked."

CHAPTER IV.

FOLKS AROUND SUNSHINE-SHADDER.

TWO TRAVELLERS AND A REMINISCENCE WITH A SIGNIFICANCE.

ONE sweltering day in July the Kinglyville local slowed up with puffs, gurgles and groans at a way-side station and fretfully awaited the ascent of a middle-aged female who mounted the steps with elephantine precision.

Breathless and perspiring, she labored into the crowded first-class and deposited herself, valise, basket and umbrella beside a young man who, despite the hot and dusty coach, looked cool and immaculate in a neat-fitting suit of grey.

"I'm thet het up 'n' mos' fagged out," she exclaimed breathlessly, as she arranged herself expansively in the seat.

"Hot day," her companion returned, indifferently.

"Yes, 'tis; 'n' it'll be a wonner if it don't thunner afore long. Be ye goin' ter Sunshine-Shadder?"

"No," he answered shortly, as he drew himself up half protestingly and fixed his eyes upon a black osprey which dangled its jets forlornly on a cream straw bonnet in the seat ahead.

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"That's where I was born 'n' raised."

"Indeed," he feebly articulated, as he glanced witheringly from the osprey to the social spirit beside him.

"Ever been there?" she queried, after a few minutes of unexpected silence.

"Never," came the curt reply, as he yielded to a suppressed yawn and settled back in the seat, determined to make the best of the situation in a crowded car of excursionists who were on their way, many of them, to celebrate the glorious twelfth at Kinglyville.

"That's wheer I'm bound fer neow, my ole home," she remarked, anticipatingly.

"Really."

"Yees, 'n' the ole homestead is still a-stan'in', 'n' clos' beside it Willie John Burr and Cousin Tom marked farms, 'n' from that it kinder sprouted roun' the hill."

"Very interesting," he drawled laboriously, conscious that her spectacl'd observers were turned somewhat searchingly upon him.

"Yes, 'tis, but theer has been a mighty lot o' change sin' then, for theer ain't half the folks theer neow theer ust ter be, 'ceptin' sech ole reliables like Limpy Beggs an' Billy Batterson."

"Many Orangemen down there?" he ventured sarcastically, as a number in full regalia sauntered down the aisle.

"Wall, yees, Orangemen thick as fleas down home. My brother Andra' builded the ferst Orange hall ter Sunshine-Shadder, 'n' it wus the last, fer it wus burnt

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down the first summer arter I was marrit on Albert Edaard—”

“How did that occur?” he asked, hoping the question would divert her rather personal inspection of his immaculate person.

“Wall, theer was a walk theer thet day, the ferst they ever had. Heaps ‘n’ heaps wur out the country roun’. Albert Edaard, thet’s my man, tuk me fer a drive thet arternoon, ‘n’ as we driv’ down the hill a-goin’ ter Sunshine-Shadder, the crowds yelled fire, ‘n’ sure enough the buildin’ was a-blazin’. Lan’, it mos’ scared me into a miscarry, fer I wus in the fam’ly way fer Dan’l thet summer; but the wust o’ the hull thing wus as we driv’ through the street, fer ole Pete Burr, who was ackin’ King James, got all riled up with smoke ‘n’ whiskey, ‘n’ wus fer drivin’ the mare right into the burnin’ buildin’; but, lan’ ter goodness, they’s pulled him back, though not afore the mane ‘n’ tail o’ the beast wus singed.”

“How unfortunate?”

“Yees, ‘twus, ‘n’ no one kin tell ter this day who set it afire,” she concluded, plaintively, as she made sundry dives into her pocket for a bit of cardboard, which the impatient conductor quickly divided in two. “Yere name ain’t Hastin’s, be et?” she inquired a few minutes later as she resumed her scrutiny.

“No, I have not the pleasure,” he answered with acidity as he turned his face from her persistent gaze and sought refuge in the pages of his partly-read magazine.

“Wall, ye could easy be a relative o’ his’n, fer I

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never seed a more strikin' resemble, no, I never," she added emphatically, much to his embarrassment and the amusement of the nearby passengers.

"The Hastin's I was thinkin' on wus member o' Parleyment onct fer Sunshine-Shadder district, 'n' lived half roads t'other side Kinglyville. He's marrit 'n' widored long sin', but not ter the lass he should o' taken; pore Zildy, she was as purty as a pictur, 'n' loved thet reskel, 'n' no amount o' tellin' could mak her think differ—"

"What was her name, did you say?" he interrupted with a sudden sparkle of interest as he half absently turned down a page of the magazine.

"Zillah Yale, they called her, though we knowt her as Zildy. She wus orphin', 'n' some sed she hed blue blood, but thet didn't save her no how, fer she just pined 'n' died afore the b'y, Wilfred, wus two year ole. The folks wheer she stayed turned her out in her trouble, 'n' Lizzie—thet's my cousin wus hired with the folks who tuk her in—'n' she sed it wus surprisin' how she loved thet puny baby, the very pictur o' Hastin's. When she died she make 'em promise never ter let it know its fether's name, 'n' no one ever did as I heerd tell on," she concluded wearily as she mopped her perspiring brow.

"What became of the boy?" her companion queried, without raising his eyes from the turned-down page.

"Seems ter me the folks near Lizzie's, who hed no childre', took him to 'dopt, 'n' neow as I come ter think on it, they used him real kind, 'n' theys say it

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wus a terror how he larned. Lizzie tole me thet one day the teacher hed a concert or some sech thing at school closin', 'n' as Hastin's wus 'lectioneerin' in the neighborhood, she ast him ter be chairman. Wilfy did so surprisin' smart at readin' 'n' recitin' thet when Hastin's handed out the prize books he put his han' on his head, 'n', sez he, 'Yer a clever lad n' a credit ter yer parents.' Lizzie wus theer, 'n' wus thet riled, but woman-like she never sed nothin' ter nobody, 'n' las' summer I heerd he wus in a bank or some kind o' office, 'n' doin' well. Surprisin', sometimes, how feater's air apt ter resemble—" But she suddenly paused, for her companion had risen and, reaching for his hat and suit-case, brushed quickly past her and out of the car.

Half an hour later the train steamed into Kinglyville, and the passenger, who had been standing in the vestibule during that time, opened the door in a half dazed manner and, hurrying down the steps of the yet moving train, was swinging himself to the platform just as an elderly gentleman emerging from the opposite coach exclaimed in a genial voice:

"Hello there, Wilfrid. See by the paper you're to be the new manager in the Commerce."

"Yes, Doctor, I'm due there to-day."

"Don't work too hard, dear boy," the friendly voice shouted as the young man forced his way through the crowd of holiday seekers packing thickly upon the narrow platform.

CHAPTER V.

THE POMPEY-BINKS SENSATION.

TWO NEIGHBORS—TWO CATS—TWO REVIVALS.

WHEN Mrs. Pompey and Miss Binks had ceased to exchange the bare civilities of every day, a ripple of excitement permeated Sunshine-Shadder from centre to circumference.

The equilibrium of the hillside was visibly disturbed, and as a result tongues swung with a pendulum-like regularity as versions of the tiff floated from mouth to mouth.

Outwardly indifferent to the fact that they were the principals in a comedy which was having a successful run from house to house, both women continued to smile as innocently and pleasantly as ever upon the saints and sinners about them.

The neat white-painted, green-shuttered cottage which headed the one long winding street belonged to Mrs. Pompey. Next to it, exactly like it and separated by a respectable picket fence, stood the cottage of Melissa Binks. A tiny verandah fronted each home, and in the good old summer time prim beds of many-hued flowers bloomed in gay profusion and excited, as did the vegetable gardens, the admiration of the passerby.

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At the time of the tiff Mrs. Pompey had reached the middle forties, tall, sparingly-fleshed and energetic. Moreover, she was a childless widow, having suffered the bereavement of Isaac Pompey, a quiet, unobtrusive individual, some years before.

Next door, Melissa Binks, a bright, sunny-faced little woman, who never seemed at cross-purposes with life, lived through the twelve months of each year in a manner corresponding to that of her neighbor. From time immemorial she had been the confidential friend of Mrs. Pompey, the friendship being of such a warmth that scarcely a day passed during which the talkative cup of tea was not brewed by one neighbor in honor of the other. Neither had ever strayed very far from the hillside. They loved the quiet village, and Melissa frequently remarked to Mrs. Pompey that it was "most in course" she would remain Melissa Binks of Sunshine-Shadder to the end of the chapter. It was a time-worn remark, but one to which Mrs. Pompey would wink her bright blue eyes and murmur that she "'spected it beed to be." And so did the neighbors, for several years had passed since David Grey had left Melissa to await his return from the distant gold diggings where one day the looked-for letters suddenly ceased.

Companions in private life, both worked side by side in the interests of the red-brick church, very little being said or done in which they did not exercise the principal voice. The majority recognized their good judgment, and even Melissa upheld Mrs. Pompey's opinion to such an extent that she seldom received a

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suggestion from Peter Paul, given in capacity as pastor or physician, without referring it next door for adoption.

Therefore, when the day arrived that a difference of opinion served to rupture years of friendship ripening to a sweet maturity, old and young rubbed their eyes in non-belief. Dame Grundy arose from the lethargy of years and, aided by the ready-repeaters and ready-receivers, thoroughly probed the bone of contention. Intensity of purpose was rewarded, for before the proverbial nine days had elapsed the news was rippling from tongue to tongue that two animals of the cat kingdom had been solely responsible for the sundering of two affections giving such splendid promise of a beautiful continuance.

The cat kingdom in Sunshine-Shadder was unusually prolific. Every house boasted a representative from the tiny kitten to the mature cat, and the majority of these were endowed with a name.

The black, sleek, prosperous-looking fellow who graced the Pompey fireside had been given no less than two. To the public he was "Pharaoh" and to his mistress "Prince." He was the apple of Mrs. Pompey's eye, but beyond that particular range he was regarded as an intolerable nuisance. Budding from innocent, pranking kittenhood into the dignity of cathood, he had degenerated very quickly into a disturber of the slumbers of the peaceful inhabitants, and in addition to this offence had been dubbed "Pharaoh" owing to the propensity he had for killing all the male kittens his eyes rested upon.

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Mrs. Pompey always turned a deaf ear to the numerous complaints which were filed from time to time, and even when speaking to Melissa in reference to his cat-ship such superfluities as "knowingest" and "cunningest" dropped from her vocabulary.

Melissa had long had her private opinion of Pharaoh, and her expressive silence on such occasions indicated her lack of enthusiasm for so unworthy a subject of the cat kingdom.

Her aversion was dimly obvious to Mrs. Pompey, but it would have in all probability melted into insignificance had not a small angora kitten appeared upon the scene.

It came one summer evening in a slatted box addressed to Melissa. It was the first express matter she had ever received, and when Billy Batterson brought it to her door she was thrown into a flurry of excitement.

An accompanying note declared the donor to be a former school teacher who had boarded at Melissa's the summer she taught in the old stone school, and this fact made the recipient more pleased than ever when "Fluffy," as she decided to call him, was freed from his prison. No cat had graced her hearth since "Spurgeon" had died of venerable age a few years before, and although "Fluffy" was only a tiny kitten, he gave promise of filling the vacancy from the moment "Spurgeon's" old saucer was unearthed and filled with a liberal allowance of rich creamy milk.

It was the first angora in Sunshine-Shadder, and before a month had elapsed all the villagers, even to

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old cripple Dan, had called to feast their eyes upon the animated ball of silky fur.

It was upon a Sunday about two months after Fluffy's advent to the hillside that the friendship of the neighbors was unexpectedly ruptured. Both ladies, who occupied the same pew in the red-brick church, had gone to service as usual that morning, returning arm-in-arm at its close. At Mrs. Pompey's gate they parted, and Melissa, bidding her drop in to tea that afternoon, retraced her steps leisurely to her own gate. She was in a particularly happy frame of mind that morning, for everything had tended to make her so. The sermon had been from a favorite text, and moreover the monotony of the still Sabbath afternoon was to be broken by her friend's acceptance to afternoon tea.

Once inside the gate she walked even more slowly up the flower-bordered path, and as she surveyed the fragrant bloom on either side she felt that her spring's labor had not been in vain. Added to this, the first bud on the potted rose underneath the sitting-room window had burst in fulness and beauty during her absence. It was the first time it had bloomed, and quickening her steps to drink in its crimson loveliness, she had gained the top step of the verandah when a much-prized begonia on the window sill suddenly tottered and fell with a crash directly upon the rose.

Immediately following, an object easily distinguished as Pharaoh leaped through the window and scurried into the garden. Melissa stood as if riveted

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to the spot, amazement and indignation pictured upon her hitherto placid countenance. A second later she rushed towards the wreckage, and then suddenly, gasping as if for breath, quickly turned from it and, opening the cottage door, half stumbled into the hall. On the threshold of the little sitting-room she uttered a startled cry and the well-worn Bible slipped from her trembling fingers and fell just a few feet from the lifeless form of Fluffy stretched upon the floor.

When Mrs. Pompey sallied forth that afternoon to drink her tea with Melissa, the latter sat in her rocker beside the window in a very depressed state of mind.

For once the click of the gate grated unpleasantly upon her ear. Quickly wiping all traces of tears from her eyes, she hurried to the door and, placing herself within its portal, a new look, very much like suppressed wrath and determination, had lined her face.

Mrs. Pompey, intent upon the beauty around her, had reached the verandah before she became aware of the small erect figure standing grim and silent before her. Her lips parted for speech, but before she could utter a word Melissa had stretched one very rigid forefinger towards the still prostrate plants.

Exclamations of dismay were quickly in order, but before they had assumed coherent form the mistress of the situation was speaking.

Mrs. Pompey rubbed the rising mist from her eyes and looked at Melissa. It was undeniably Melissa in her brown Sunday-go-to-meeting gown, but the gentle voice she loved to hear had strangely changed, and

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for once it rang with a dominant metallic sound as minute details of the morning's disaster rent the air.

For once the monotony of the quiet Sabbath was broken, and even the sleepy four-o'clocks bunched in rich profusion around the steps winked their eyes in sympathetic accord as, aided by the breeze, they rustled against the stiffly starched print gown of Mrs. Pompey, who stood before Melissa, the personification of wounded innocence, her breath coming and going in gasps or terminating in sighs and sobs.

Harsh words rolled forth endlessly, but when the last spasmodic effort was finally dislodged from her injured heart in form of a request which demanded the life of Pharaoh as a reparation, Mrs. Pompey suddenly writhed as if from the sting of a lash.

Scarcely had the ultimatum been given before expostulations and pleas thickened the already disturbed air. Melissa essayed to speak, but finally closed her lips and, rubbing her tearful eyes, gave neighbor Pompey the benefit of her attention. During her life she had always maintained a pretty even temper, but now, as the parleyings of mercy fell upon her ear, her already heightened sense of injury waxed to the boiling point and surged over. Wrathful words gushed forth in turbulent overflow, submerging almost instantly the innumerable pleas of her old-time friend. They were stormy in the extreme and gave promise of endless duration when, strange as it may seem, Melissa suddenly halted, recovered her breath and, adding confusion to the misery of her suppliant, wheeled into the house and slammed the door.

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Mrs. Pompey very quickly grasped the situation and, drawing herself up at least two inches, hastened down the path, and letting herself out of the gate, walked very smartly in the direction of her neat white-painted, green-shuttered cottage.

That evening Pharaoh was denied the exercise of his gastronomic pleasures. A week from that day Mrs. Pompey and Melisse occupied separate pews in the red-brick church. Still later, when the news of the rupture was under animated discussion, a digestive spice was added to the dainty morsel in everybody's mouth by the news that Pharaoh had been found suspended to a cord from the elm in the school-yard.

Then everybody chattered unmercifully except the teacher, who dutifully arraigned the miscreants upon a charge of cruelty to animals, but as justice to the departed Angora was the plea put forth, punishment was suspended.

That a reconciliation would follow in the course of a few weeks was the general conjecture, but as the weeks slipped into months and repeated their flight, the busy bees shook their heads and hummed. Towards each other both manifested the coolest indifference. Protestations from pastor and friends prevailed not, but rather intensified the antipathy. Effects of the estrangement were felt by friends on either side, and especially by Peter Paul, for their lack of co-operation in the church was hurtful to the cause which they had hitherto so energetically

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espoused. The congregation was far from self-supporting, and the spiritual deadness evinced by two of its chief props gave its pastor many an anxious hour. If their enthusiasm had ever been needed it seemed to be at this particular time, for although the membership embraced the hillside and country round, and although the older heads worked with a will, the younger blood of the church seemed particularly slow in manifesting the zeal of their forefathers.

Towards the close of the following autumn the spiritual and financial condition of the little congregation showed but slight improvement. With the realization of its precarious state ever before him, Peter Paul at last decided that an awakening other than he could enthuse might be an essential in strengthening the walls of his little Zion. A new spirit must arise in the hearts of his people, and as he quietly and prayerfully considered the problem confronting him he became quite buoyed up with the thought of a revival, the introduction of which would in all probability sweep away the long-standing enmity between two of his parishioners and tone up the languor of others.

Therefore it was announced on a Sunday in late November that Billy Cain, a reclaimed prize-fighter, who was then upon an evangelical tour, would hold nightly meetings during the following week. It was the first revival ever held in Sunshine-Shadder, and many looked forward to the initial meeting, some from the motive which prompted it, but many from the novelty of seeing the famed revivalist.

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Promptly as announced, Billy Cain, a tall, muscular giant with a badly scarred face, appeared in the red-brick church, and even at the close of the first service it was felt that his coming heralded a new era in the religious life of Sunshine-Shadder. To his listeners, the pithy sketches of his early life, his conversion from the ring, and the original down-pour of truths voiced in utterances which met them on their own simple level, stirred conviction to their hearts as never before.

Among the number gathered there from night to night Mrs. Pompey and Melissa were conspicuous, and although the spirit of forgiveness did not openly manifest itself, Peter Paul and Billy Cain, to whom the situation had been outlined, worked very diplomatically towards the effective closing of the breach between the one-time friends. To break through the barrier was a delicate task, yet when the last night's service hour drew near, the stranger within the gate felt that the barrier would be surmounted if preaching and prayer were at all effective.

Melissa was late that night, and tip-toed in during the first prayer. The pews were packed on either side, and when Peter Paul, who was standing near the door, ushered her into the first available space, she suddenly experienced the mortification of finding herself directly behind neighbor Pompey, who was fervently responding to the petitions solicited.

There were few eyes that night which did not rest upon the speaker, who after a few preliminary remarks launched forth in simple earnestness on the

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"Duty of Forgiveness." It was simple and impressive, direct and piercing to the heart's core, and even Melissa forgot the presence of the crape-bonneted woman in front as she drank in the appeals of this big rough man with an irresistible personality, who was endeavoring in his homely way to help them keep their feet more steadfastly on the path between the cradle and the cross.

Tears stood in many an eye as the service drew to a close that night, and none were surprised when he requested them as they dispersed to signify their good-will one toward another by the expressive hand-clasp. Slipping down the aisle as the last verse of the closing hymn was being sung, he started the "shake" by extending his hand to right and left. Approaching Mrs. Pompey, who was fidgeting with her bonnet-strings, he proffered his hand, and stretching forth his left to Melissa, who had stepped from her seat, he shook both heartily. Still clasping them he looked quickly from one discomfited face to the other, and then with the nicety of an expert he drew Melissa's hand by a dexterous movement into the broad palm where rested the hand of Mrs. Pompey. Placing his disengaged one over both, he pressed them by an action which spoke louder than words, and as he hurried from them he whispered in a genial undertone, "Now's the accepted time."

As their hands fell awkwardly apart they caught each other's glance and smiled.

Slowly and with evident reluctance many wended their way home that night, the jubilant among

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them singing snatch/s of revival hymns. Mrs. Pompey and Melissa somehow found themselves together and arm-in-arm walked silently along the frozen street. Silence seemed golden, for not a word was exchanged until they neared the general store. A light was still burning, and Mrs. Pompey suddenly halted at the door and withdrawing her arm from Melissa's, exclaimed in a strangely high-wrought key: "I must step in 'n' get some fixin's fer my plum puddin'." And Melissa followed her in.

The store was deserted save for Limpy, who was lounging, pipe in mouth, before the fire. Upon their entrance he suddenly straightened up and pursing his mouth smothered a bursting chuckle.

"Them 'livivals done et," he mentally calculated, as he handed Mrs. Pompey her parcels and stumped to the postal corner, from which he returned with a letter and paper, exclaiming in admirable unconcern: "Theer's been a letter 'n' paper lyin' here fer ye, 'Lissy, well nigh unto three days."

"Another o' them pesky cirklars, I'll warrant," she remarked as she stowed the letter and paper in her muff and joined Mrs. Pompey at the door.

"Ever sin' I was ailin' las' fall, 'n' took that 'erb treatment, I've been pested with cirklars," she remarked by way of conversation as they continued their walk.

"You've no idee how I fretted 'bout you then, 'Lissy. We've jest been two childre' till them 'livivals."

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It was early next morning that Melissa hurried into Mrs. Pompey's and found that lady at breakfast.

"It wa'n't a cirklar after all," she panted as she pushed the letter into Mrs. Pompey's hand and sank into the fireside rocker.

"Lan' sakes, I can't believe it's from Davie after all them years," Mrs. Pompey declared a little later as she poured Melissa a cup of tea.

"An' jest to think he was in prison a hull twelve year afore they found he wus the wrong man—"

"The Lord's been with him, though," Melissa interrupted, "fer he says he has health 'n' plenty; but as fer marryin' at my age—"

"Neow, 'Lissy, we'll jest set it fer Christmas day, 'n' I'll manage the hull fixin's," interposed Mrs. Pompey as she dropped a lump of sugar in Melissa's already sweetened tea.

It was Christmas day three weeks later that found a middle-aged man welcomed back to Sunshine-Shadder as David Gray. It was also the wedding day of Melissa Binks, and it was remarked that when David Gray slipped a twenty-dollar gold piece into the hand of Peter Paul that good man actually gasped. At the little wedding feast, over which Mrs. Pompey presided and at which Billy Cain was an honored guest, Peter Paul said the following grace:

"Lord, Thou who rulest wisely and well, we thank Thee for this bridal feast. Let us each rejoice and feel with Thy benediction that this has indeed been a month of revivals."

CHAPTER VI. *AN EVENING AT THE STORE.*

REMARKS ON TEMPERANCE AND SOME NEWS OF LOCAL INTEREST.

LIGHTS twinkled in the windows of the old stone school, and the group focused at Limpy's remarked it was "meetin' night."

It was Friday evening, and after the heat of the early August day the villagers clustered about their open doors, and in the semi-darkness abandoned themselves to the delicious cool which lends a respite to the hottest day.

In Sunshine-Shadder the moon and stars had but slight competition in the distribution of light, for the lamp was generally extinguished, especially in winter, before the curfew hour. In summer still earlier retirement snuffed out the cheery twinkle, but season in and season out there was one exception to the order, and this was found in the illumination which emanated from the general store.

It was the one bright ray along the hillside, and many a belated traveller has exclaimed joyfully as he sighted the cheerful beacon. Limpy always lighted up at six in winter and eight in summer. The oil lamps within the store were always trimmed and ready, as were the two lanterns suspended from the rickety verandah fronting the store.

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On the evening that the lights gleamed from the windows of the school the lanterns shed their usual lustre at the store. The day had been swelteringly hot and Limpy had early emerged from the stuffy within and taken his position in the door. The toilers of the day had swung in from different directions, and with a number of the villagers reclined upon the crates and boxes lined along the wall, while the overflow barricaded the steps and with hearty abandonment smoked and talked by turns.

"Some extry goin's on at the Son's ter-night, I'll warrant," Limpy remarked as he fixed his eyes upon the stream of light.

"Yees, theer must be shore, fer when I was cuttin' through the medder while ago, I seed a hull load o' fifth liners a-headin' here," exclaimed young Jack Burr, of Plum-hollow farm, as he paused, knife balanced in a game of mumety-peg.

"Theer will be a lot o' guff goin' on the night," chirped old Tommy Stead, as he absently snapped his suspenders.

"Yes, 'n' I be kinky right, fer darter Susan be a-sayin' at supper that Jack Taylor, Tim's eldest, 'n' Spotty Wilson be a-jinin', 'n' I calkilate the visitors 'll be a-doin' the goatin' ack," he concluded as he snapped a button loose.

"They be a interesting lot o' Sons and Darters o' Temperance, fer ter coom down ter the rock-bottom. Theer be few what know what theer a-jinin' fer," Limpy remarked as he struck a match on his wooden peg.

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"That's been my 'pinion from the first," declared Billy Parker, the blacksmith; "they do a good sight more talkin' than aakin', leastways on this here hill, 'n' when they do pick up a poor crittur from the highways and byways they kill their charity ack by waggin' their tongues so hard ever arter."

"Some truth ter that, Bill," remarked Sam Jones, the rival smith; "fer, fellers, the winter I shoed fer Jim Blink, ter Kinglyville, theer be a feller called Johnson, carpenter by trade, pretty fast-goin' chap; but as he was smart 'n' a singer, some of the girls got him in the temperance saccity, 'n' fer awhile everythin' went fine till one night they driv' to visit another lodge, 'n' theer my brave boy got mixed up with a frisky bunch 'n' hit the bottle so hard he wus nowheer in sight when they started back again. Nex' day he showed up in town, 'n' when they got wind o' it, the head mucky-muck sent him a summons to 'pear 'n' answer the hen'us charge o' bein' drunk. Course he didn't, fer nat'lly he felt sort o' shamed, 'n' 'stead o' takin' him back fer another try, they's expelled him from the saccity 'n' made him go it all the faster. A few nights arter that he got drunk 'n' went lickety-spat inter the coup. But jes' as it hapened along cum the Salvation Army 'n' fished him out, took him to their home, 'n' started him afresh on the high 'n' narrer path. 'N' fellers, las' time I seed Jim Blink he wus tellin' me that Johnson was down ter work in earnest a-poundin' nails be day 'n' beatin' the army drum be night."

"Neow, thet's the kind o' temperance I hev' in

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min'," applauded Limpy; "'n' it 'pears ter me if the childre' here wus straightened up, 'n' tol' thet theer place wus not ter line up every meetin', say pass-word, give grip, 'n' swing lip twixt giggles, there would be more done, but I'm thinkin' theer would be fewer a-climbin' that theer hill; neow mark me words."

An unexpected silence settled over the group till Tommy Stead suddenly tossed his suspender button in the air and chuckled.

"S'pose ye heerd that Nell Horn has gone back on Jamsey Pompey?"

"Wall, never; aren't they ter be coupled at Christmas?" Limpy exclaimed in surprise.

"That might o' been, but she's declared it off, fer darter Susan seed her a-steppin' it home las' Sunday night with the new school teacher, although Jamsey be a-waitin' be the door ter see her home. Seems Jamsey got tight the Saturday night he driv' his Yankee cousin ter catch the train ter Kinglyville, 'n' thet was the cause o' the unexpected splittin'."

"Yees, it's all up with Jamsey, 'n' she's mighty pert about it," snickered Billy Parker, "fer the boys be sayin' ter the shop that she stood up in meetin' other night 'n' recited a piece called 'Whose lips tech licker shall never tech mine.'"

"Wall, seein' it's Jamsey's first offence, 'n' bein' one o' the best boys in this here part, she might o' done differ', 'n' maybe the day'll come to mak' her think on it," Limpy remarked as he stumped to the

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edge of the verandah and fastened his eyes upon the dim outline of a vehicle coming down the hill.

"Billy's in good time the night," he declared as he shook the ashes from his pipe and hurried into the store, where he turned up the lights preparatory to sorting mail.

A few minutes later a passengerless stage drove up before the door, and once the mail bag had been swung into the hands of the nearest they one and all filed into the store.

Limpy quickly conveyed it to the partitioned space, where he closed the door and drew down the wicket shutter. Brightening up his steel-rimmed glasses reposing above his grey-tufted eyebrows, he adjusted them very precisely and proceeded to sort and stamp the weekly budget.

Grouped outside the partition wall, the crowd, which had quickly multiplied, patiently waited, encouraged by the stamp and rustle within. Then quite unexpectedly the wicket flew up and heralded a press forward to face the much-loved man within. All eyes were riveted upon the package in Limpy's hand, and as he thumbed the letters over supreme pleasure or evident disappointment lined the faces of those who hurried away or collapsed upon one of the several barrels and boxes scattered about. Limpy never remained in the office after the satisfaction of distribution, and once he had turned down the light he stumped towards the group and, settling himself upon a box behind the counter, beamed good-naturedly upon his friends.

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Conversation had lapsed to stagnation point when Billy Batterson entered, busily engaged in mopping his perspiring brow with a huge bandana.

"Ye luk het up," remarked Jack Lane, as he motioned Billy to a space upon his box.

"It's beed the hottest day this summer, 'n' as Snip's feet air givin' out it's nip 'n' tuck ter mak' the trip," he replied as he sank wearily into the one chair in the store, which Tommy Stead unexpectedly vacated in his honor.

"Neow, Tommy, youse know well thet the biggest liar allers gets thet chair, 'n' ye needn't be snuggin' it down 'longside o' Jack over theer, thinkin' Billy has arrived with a wallupin' un' ter-night," Billy Parker exclaimed reproachfully as he settled himself more comfortably upon the vinegar keg.

"Mech doin' the day?" Limpy inquired, when the general titter caused by Billy's raillery had subsided.

"Naw, not a heap, 'specially as real estate slump has knocked life outern things. Money is tight, 'n' credit at banks as short as Willum Bright ust ter say it wus on Wall Street. Yet, the new shirt factory be goin' ahead, 'n' Silay Briggs is goin' ter buy fer cash the Palace Hotel, 'n' at the surprisin' price of twenty thousan'—"

"I say, that's the limit," interrupted Sam Jones; "that old Judas Scarrion been bleedin' the poor whiskey suckers ever sin' he started the 'Rush-in,' well-nigh ten year ago."

"It's bloody money, fer sure, b'ys," squealed Tommy Stead as he cleared his husky throat. "But

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then he allers made a p'int ter cater ter them fools o' lumber-jacks, dopin' 'em fer the almighty dollar every spring, 'n' I ain't 'stonished he has twenty thousan', which is a fortune ter us poor critters."

"Wall, it's a queer warl, 'n' if we air poor, we have the less ter answer, 'n' thet's mech ter be thankful fer, sometimes," Limpy remarked as he leaned his arms on the web of gingham before him.

"An' neow's I cum ter think, ye can't guess who was buried ter-day?" Billy mysteriously inquired.

"It wus no mor'n 'n' no less than ole Bill Hastin's; jes' seed the tail end o' the procession as I driv' on ter Main Street—"

"Wall, o' all thet's onnateral, who'd thought Bill would hev got his subpoena so soon," Tommy reflectively remarked.

"Heart kinked two days ago," Billy added, by way of explanation.

"Yer don't say?" Limpy ejaculated; "'n' theer be one thing, fellers, though be gone ter kingdom come, or jedgment hall, if he wus ter run ag'in fer this here ridin' he wouldn't get my vote, 'n'I know I speak fer the heft o' the countryside."

"Nor mine, either," seconded Tommy; "fer arter the way he used Zildy Yale, 'n' hitched hisself so soon arter ter ole Sol Timmon's darter, I sed ter Joe Blyth, who wus doin' the missionair ack that run, 'No, ye doan' cum over Tommy Stead with yer dirty money. I hain't got no eddicatin' ter speak o', but I'm a man fer a' that,' 'n' I sez ter Joe, 'put them dirty green-backs in yer pocket, fer no son o' Nick

AN EVENING AT THE STORE

is goin' ter run this ridin' owin' ter my vote,' 'n' boys, as I sez it, I turned ter the plough 'n' started a new furrer."

"Bully fer ye," laughed a sympathetic listener.

"Wall, I guess he'd mor'n his share o' sins ter smuggle through the golden gate," remarked Billy Batterson. "But mos' surprisin' thin' is thet he made a will, 'n' as his ole woman ist dead, 'n' no fambly be her, he up 'n' left everythin' ter Zildy's boy. Seems he ist manager o' the Commerce Bank, 'n' somehow the fact o' his bein' Zildy's son got ter the ole man's ear, fer it be sed thet o' late years he has been huntin' on sly fer him. When the bad spell coom on, he begged Nancy Code, the housekeeper, to send fer the boy; 'n' when he arrived, never suspectin' anythin' but business, 'n' foun' out the meanin' o' it all, theer be high doin's, I kin tell ye. Nancy was situated near the keyhole, 'n' she sed the way Hastin's begged 'n' cried mos' melted the kid's heart, same as it oncet did his ma's. Nex' mornin' he wus dead, 'n' jes' 'fore he made a die o' it, Nancy slipped in the room, 'n' Hastin's wus a-cryin' 'n' pleadin' 'n' though Wilfrid wus real obstinate fer awhile, he sort o' unexpected slipped unto his knees beside the bed 'n' put both arms aroun' the ole man, 'n' it wus in them arms he died."

"Neow, that beats all I ever heerd; seems the on-expected is allers happening," Limpy exclaimed, as he yawned significantly and, rising, proceeded to put-ter around the stove, which change in programme told the boys it was time to shut up shop.

CHAPTER VII.

LIMPY'S NEW YEAR.

AN OLD RESOLUTION REVIVED AND EXECUTED.

It was the first of January, and the monotony of a quiet winter faced the dwellers on the hillside.

Snow fell ever so softly on the already whitened country, and the occasional jingle of bells proclaimed the expected arrival of the sleigh-load invited for the festive spread. Nearly every household partook of a turkey dinner on that day, for as a rule the majority of housewives prided themselves upon the number of birds they could fatten up for market and holiday use.

New Year's morning not only found the labors of the day suspended but for once in the history of Sunshine-Shadder the door of the general store was closed and locked. It was the first New Year that Limpy had ever absented himself from the well-known stand, and early as it was many conjectures were afloat as to the why and wherefore of this extravagant observance.

The surmises at issue, however, could have been simply solved if the curious had been able to peep behind the scenes, or rather into the small bedroom in Billy Batterson's home, where Limpy, their only

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boarder, was busily engaged in the laborious task of "brushing up."

Limpy had made his home with the Batterson family for many years. In fact, he had lodged there from the day he had arrived crippled for life from one of the logging camps of the timber limits, whose woody profusion still stretched far and wide. His accident had been considered the forerunner of a useless life, but it early proved to be the beginning of a very active one which saw the erection of the corner store and the installation of a proprietor who slowly but surely feathered his nest for moderate comfort.

Long before he had opened his eyes that New Year's morning, Billy's wife and eldest daughter had been early astir, and in the round of duties had first and foremost carefully aired and pressed afresh a broadcloth suit.

Its advent from the cedar chest which stood in Limpy's room always signalized an event, for it was seldom that the key of the padlocked box was turned to release the suit save when the gloom of a funeral procession pervaded the village.

When Limpy winked his eyes to wakefulness that morning the suit hung very primly over the one chair in the room. It was the first object which arrested his attention, and a little later as he stood before them an air of indecision lined his face as his gaze travelled uncertainly from them to the well-worn "every-day's" slouched over the bed-post. His preference for the latter was very evident, but after sundry men-

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tal excursions had been made from the shabby to the genteel he finally labored into the immaculate blacks.

This portion of his toilet completed, his highly polished shoe was brought into requisition, and with the aid of a boot-jack the most laborious of all tasks was at an end.

The completion brought forth a series of unintelligible exclamations and yawns as he limped from the chair and approached the bureau. Steadying himself with difficulty before it, he cautiously tilted forward the small cracked mirror that stood in dilapidated dignity upon it. He appeared quite unfamiliar with the adjustment of it, but after several attempts had been made to focus the dusty reflector he at length succeeded and uttering a few inarticulate symptoms of annoyance leaned forward and peered quite suspiciously at the morning's "make-up" of the "made-over."

His efforts had not been in vain. The wayward locks of silver grey which had been brushed, combed and oiled lay passively on either side of the unfamiliar part. The bushy tufted eyebrows had received their pat so effectively that every hair reposed in partial submission. The clean-shaven face, ruddier than usual, glistened from recent immersion and subjection to lather and razor, requisites of toilet which were still visible in front of a badly damaged glass on the window-sill.

Such was the view that met the keen grey eyes which travelled at first grudgingly and then approvingly from the "done-over" crown to the laundered

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collar and new plaid tie. So intently was he absorbed in the reflection before him that it was some moments before a heavy footstep from behind caused him to turn, and as he did so he came face to face with Billy. Both laughed heartily, and as he reached for his old mink ear-lapped cap and silver-headed cane, he half chuckled, "Aye, aye, Billy, there's no fool like 'n' old un."

After a hasty breakfast that morning, accompanied by Billy, who was similarly "done-up," they wended their way up the village street, quite conscious that many eyes were upon them, for even upon a work day few passed up or down without being observed. But that morning the quick movement of a blind or the deft adjustment of a face in an unfrosted pane did not disconcert either as they walked along the frozen path, halting only when they reached a small white-painted green shuttered cottage which stood quite pretentiously at the head of the street. Several of the curious, who had been watching their progress from an upstairs window, suddenly rubbed their eyes in non-belief and looked once more, and just in time to see Limpy, followed by Billy, enter the cottage unannounced.

"Well, if that don't beat all," was the general exclamation. "Something he a-doin' ter Widow Pompey's."

It was the first time in the history of Sunshine-Shadder that Limpy had been known to enter Widow Pompey's home, and various were the surmises as to

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the nature of this unexpected visit. The widow had been in her pew the previous Sabbath and had presided at the Ladies' Aid Society the following Monday. To all appearances she had been in the enjoyment of her usual good health, and it was only after several brain-racking hours had ensued that the neighbors duly arrived at a two-fold conclusion which when summed up indicated that the widow must have taken seriously ill, and that Limpy, who knew the A B C of law, had been summoned with Billy as witness to write her will.

A little later a degree of confirmation was given to this when Peter Paul left the manse and bent his steps in the direction of Mrs. Pompey's cottage. Unrest prevailed in several hearts that morning to the extent that two or three of the most inquisitive females bonnetted and shawled themselves quite early in the afternoon and decided as they started forth to sift the little mystery to the bottom by calling upon Melissa Grey, who lived next door. She was usually found at home, but upon this occasion no response met their repeated knocks, and it was not until some minutes had elapsed that the thought occurred to them that Melissa would, naturally be at Mrs. Pompey's. Nursing this thought as a very feasible one, they turned from Melissa's door, and with hearts beating one-fourth anxiety and three-fourths curiosity, they directed their steps to the next residence.

As they unlatched the gate, the door of the cottage suddenly opened and Peter Paul and Billy Batterson came down the walk. Almost immediately an over-

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flow of solicitous enquiries from the group at the gate unexpectedly checked the greetings upon the lips of the minister and Billy.

Suppressed mirth became visible upon both faces, but controlling it admirably they announced to the open-mouthed enquirers that Mrs. Pompey was in the enjoyment of excellent health. "In fact," emphasized Peter Paul, "she has decided to begin the new year as Mrs. Limpold Beggs."

It was about five that afternoon when Billy Parker crossed the fields to pay his respects to Tommy Stead and his daughter Sue. He not only carried a gift for Sue, but a very juicy piece of news, which he lavished upon the astonished ears of his host after the hearty handshake had been given.

"Who'd ever thought o' Limpy doin' it up so slick at his time o' life? Why, if it wa'nt first o' year, I would say 't was April fool," exclaimed the incredulous Tommy.

"Wall, Billy," he remarked a little later as he presented himself unexpectedly at the parlor door and interrupted Billy, who was demonstrating the interpretation of a conversation lozenger, "I wus goin' ter remark," he added, as he diplomatically turned his eyes to the ceiling, "that if I hev'n't lost my thinks, I'll be durned if the widder didn't toe it consid'ble with Limpy afore he lost his leg, arter which she did the durnest ack o' her life by hitchin' herself ter that liver-complainted sang-tew-moses Pompey."

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Before Billy, who had gradually retreated to the end of the sofa, had time to reply, Tommy had closed the door and resumed his seat beside the kitchen fire.

"Yes, I'm goin' ter start the new year as I oughter done years ago, 'n' the late widder here, I'm a-goin' ter say, was quite willin' ter try the partnership. When I axed her the question she refused ter hear, well nigh over twenty years ago."

The little wedding party, numbering some four guests, raised their glasses of currant wine and drank to the health and happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Limpold Beggs.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARIA DALE.

A DELUGE WHICH OPENED, EXPLAINED AND CLOSED A LIFELONG REGRET.

RAIN had fallen steadily over Sunshine-Shadder for six long days. The inhabitants had prayed for a downfall upon their thirsty earth, and for the first three days regarded it as a dispensation, but after that many anxious eyes turned from the ripening fields and gardens to the non-committal sky.

Main Street for the first time in local history had swollen and boiled over. The numerous spurs jutting over the irregular acreage had followed suit till hard earth of a week before gushed in porridgy abandonment over the right-of-way, oozing recklessly over immaculate walks or submerging fragrant bloom in much-prized flower-beds. The noticeable indentation in front of Maria Dale's cottage had risen to level by sucking in the pasty overflow, which in return sent a steady stream under the picket fence into her little garden. The slatted walk leading to the cottage had caught the infection, for between the slats yeasty bubbles rose and fell.

Maria Dale was the village dressmaker, and sole occupant of the little weather-beat

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snuggled close to the temperance house. She had not opened her front door that morning, but now at the noon hour, clad in an old raincoat and her head bound up in a shoulder shawl, she appeared in the doorway.

One hand grasped a broom while the other boasted a spade on which she leaned half dejectedly as she surveyed the scene before her. The several lines which seamed her pale face deepened as her glance travelled from the murky sky and swollen streets to the little verandah where the overturned flower-pots and wind-tossed vines added to the day's confusion.

This continued onslaught to the hillside provoked her disapproval as she concluded her inspection of the elementary conditions and turned impatiently to the crying needs about her.

There was much to be done, and setting busily to work only a few minutes elapsed before she had adjusted the overturned plants and tied up the broken cords of the clematis which hung in purple and white profusion. Her attention was next directed to the verandah floor, where the broom was brought to bear upon the pools of water, which were unceremoniously flung into the garden. A little later she flitted about the rain-soaked beds and bolstered up the overburdened plants and shrubs, and with sundry other touches restored the garden to a semblance of its former appearance.

The next half-hour found her outside the gate endeavoring to check the rivulets about her. Her hands, though small, were hardened by the daily routine of labor and not at all strange in the manipu-

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lation of the spade, over which she bent with a quiet energy which resulted in the formation of several channels which sent the unwelcome flow in another direction.

Once again inside the gate the muddy condition of the walk was duly observed. Work here seemed but wasted energy, but bending over a loosened slat near the gate she drew it up, and inserting her spade scooped up several quarts of mud, which would serve to retard the upward flow. Replacing the slat, she was energetically driving home the rusty nail when her attention became suddenly riveted upon a small object protruding half way up between the next two slats.

For a few seconds she remained in her recumbent position, her eyes glued as it were to the mud-stained object which, from its immersion in the earth, had lost nearly all resemblance to a pocket-book. The yeasty bed had forced it from its hiding place, and as she picked it up all thought of further work vanished as she hurried into the cottage, almost forgetting in her evident excitement to remove her muddy rubbers before entering the hall, where the linoleum shone clean and dustless.

Just as she closed the door the gate clicked, and opening it again her eyes fell upon a tall, thin, sharp-featured woman who hurried up the walk.

"My, but yer real enterprisin'," she half laughed as she scraped her rubberless boots on the verandah steps, regardless of the scraper in sight.

"This be a week for shore," she breathlessly continued, as she lowered the dripping umbrella, which

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she proceeded to carry inside, but for the intervention of Maria who, noting her intention, quietly remarked:

"Just leave your umbrella at the door, Mrs. Riggs. It was so wet I scarcely thought you would venture for the fitting," she added as she ushered her customer into the plain but cosily furnished front room, where her fittings took place.

"Oh, rain don't stop me where a dress be concerned; but o' all the women, ye do beat the Dutch fer work," she added, as she collapsed comfortably into the one horse-hair rocker in the room.

"Tew think it a-pourin' rain 'n' ye a-diggin' ditches; that's wheer a man comes in handy, as I sez ter Bill."

Maria made a few futile attempts at jocularly and hurried to the kitchen at the end of the hall.

Closing the door she crossed over to the highly polished stove on which the kettle sang lustily, and shutting the damper, drew from her pocket the muddy find, which she laid upon the remotest corner of the stove to dry.

A hasty toilet followed, and she returned to the room a few minutes later, carrying on her arm a half-finished cashmere gown.

It was the first time in years her thoughts drifted from her task as she hovered around the tall, lanky figure, cutting here and stitching there. The weariness experienced in fitting this particular garment was almost overpowering, and as she inserted the last mouthful of pins into the many seams a sigh of relief unconsciously escaped her lips. It was before an old

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mahogany mirror which reached from the faded Brussels to the ceiling that she fitted her customers, and as she gave utterance to this sign of weariness the sharp eyes of Mrs. Riggs scrutinized her intently as she prepared to disrobe the length of figure of its gown.

"My, you're agein', 'Riah," she suddenly burst forth as she fixed her eyes on the reflected face. "Seems no time sin' we were all at the picnic up ter Butternut Grove—jes' two weeks afore I wus marrit on Bill—'n' you 'n' Albert James most in same boat as me 'n' Bill. But laws, when you do look at it, it's a long spell, too."

"It's fifteen years," her patient listener interrupted, as a nervous flush mantled the pale face that had lost much of its roundness and bloom.

"Why, I declare, if ye ain't a-blushin', 'n' at yer time; but, as I sez ter preacher Paul t'other day, it's a shame the way Albert did by you, 'n' you as is gettin' up in years; it's more the pity, I'm thet sorry ye throwed ole Jim Wood 'n' missed the chanst o' thet comfortable ferm—"

"Thank you, Mrs. Riggs, I'm very comfortable and happy; and as for my lost chances, it's quite unnecessary to discuss them."

And the small, slight woman in the tidy blue print gown looked several inches taller and scarcely her forty years as a flush mantled her face and a significant light sparkled in the hitherto sad grey eyes.

"Yes, thet may be, but you've ter work hard, 'n' I

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of'en feel like sendin' Billie or Jimmie over to give you a han' at the weedin'," she lamely retorted.

"You're very thoughtful, but I have managed so far, and when I find I can't, I'll have the less to do," she answered half defensively as she folded the dress and laid it over a chair.

"I thought you would have been to the Ladies' Aid Society this afternoon," Maria remarked, as Mrs. Riggs stood once more outside the door.

"I wus goin', but the way some folks, mentionin' no names, tries ter run church 'n' preacher, I sez ter Bill, 'Let 'em shift fer themselves fer awhile.' But, be the way, I'll be wantin' that dress fer cousin John's weddin', week come Friday."

"I'll be able to give it to you to-morrow night if nothing happens," Maria responded as she thankfully watched Mrs. Riggs raise the leaky umbrella.

"If it keeps on rainin' like this the craps will be spiled," she called out as she picked her steps across the street.

Maria breathed a sigh of relief as she closed the door and hurried to the kitchen, fearful that the fire had scorched her discovery. However, it lay just where she had left it, looking much greyer and drier. It was long past noon hour, but disregarding all thoughts of food she set the kettle aside, and, picking up the book, left the kitchen and went mechanically up the staircase to her bedroom.

Once inside the simply furnished room she threw herself across the crotcheted spread on the old four-poster, and burying her face in the hand which

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clasped the soiled book, the pent-up tears of years suddenly broke forth in heartsick abandonment.

Late that afternoon Maria sat in her rocker beside the muslin-curtained window. The rain still pattered on the roof, and as she rocked gently to and fro she caught the fragrance from the garden as it stole into the room.

On the street below, regardless of weather conditions, Billie and Jimmie Riggs splashed about in the porridgy earth.

"It's rainin' on Dale's curtain," she heard the younger of the two remark, and deftly drawing in the escaped frill of muslin she looped it back. The pocket-book was open on her knee, and between the straps mildewed bank bills to the amount of several hundred dollars were disclosed to view.

The floodgates of fifteen bitter years were unexpectedly opened as she gazed in bewilderment at the contents on her lap. Incidents of the past crowded thick and fast before her tear-dimmed vision, and once more she was ushered back to the bygone days when Maria Dale was the village belle and Albert James the favored suitor.

Orphaned in infancy without so much as a penny, he had started life very early in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the general store. Shortly after their engagement he was offered a position with a dry goods firm in the city and Maria, ambitious for their future, encouraged him in his acceptance.

Six months after his departure her mother died,

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and a little later another sorrow threw its shadow across the fortunes of her father and herself by the receipt of a notice of foreclosure of the mortgage which had rested for some time upon their little home and its adjoining acreage. Continued ill health of the once hard-working old John Dale had year in and year out enacted the play of the strong against the weak until the former finally narrowed its net to a close.

Immeshed beyond release, father and daughter were about to submit to the inevitable when Peter Paul, the salvation of many on the hillside, quietly slipped the required amount into the astonished and trembling hand of old John Dale.

In the meantime Maria had outlined their hopeless situation to Albert, and although he could ill afford the time, he surprised the cottage one evening shortly after the threatening blow had fallen.

His stay, though of short duration, was a very happy one for the reunited lovers and also for John Dale, who was beside himself with joy over the blessing bestowed upon him by Peter Paul the day before.

Albert left for the city in the grey dawn of the following morning, and it was but a few hours after the old stage had rattled him away that it was discovered he had left his overcoat behind, taking in the semi-darkness of the early morning one belonging to John Dale. It was similar in shade but, unlike Albert's, carried in the inside pocket a book containing the fateful bills which the old man in his excitement had forgotten to remove from his coat. Great

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consternation prevailed in the little house until the return of the stage which brought a parcel containing the coat but not the pocket-book, which Maria hopefully assured her father would arrive by special messenger the following day. The next day, however, brought no tidings, and the suspense of both became so intense that a parcel containing Albert's coat, together with a letter requesting the return of the book, was despatched by a friendly villager, who brought back a letter denying all knowledge of the pocket-book. A week later the mortgage was foreclosed, and on the day of its foreclosure broken-hearted John Dale slipped away from life's cares, leaving Maria to face the grim future, which was somewhat softened when arrangements were made whereby for a modest rental she was given use of the cottage and garden which she loved so well.

Of Albert's innocence she never doubted but, obeying the last wish of her father, the little betrothal ring was returned to him.

And now, after fifteen years, proof of his innocence lay before her, although she had never doubted it once through the lonely, bitter years of schooled indifference.

That evening as she sat at the neatly arranged tea table she drained the tea drops from the old willow-patterned cup and, looking at the tea leaves, she suddenly caressed the old Maltese, who from time to time reached up a velvet paw.

"Yes, Peter, the cup says I'm to take a trip to the

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city soon to visit a big store to adjust a money matter, and as for the round clear bargain in the cup, time will tell."

In answer Peter blinked his eyes and whisked very significantly about Maria's skirt as she set the teacup down and reached for the cream jug.

A few days after the discovery of the pocket-book the stage from Sunshine-Shadder drew up to Kinglyville depot just in time to permit its passengers to board the train bound for the city.

Among the passengers to alight at the city depot next morning a small, slight woman in a neat-fitting black serge suit was noticeable. A black chip walking hat rested on her mass of brown, white-threaded hair, while the cream lace scarf knotted at her throat gave a touch of color to the pale, wistful face of Maria Dale.

There were three others on board from Sunshine-Shadder that morning, and all three wondered what had prompted Maria to visit the city.

The rain of the week had subsided and the sun shone brightly as she boarded a car and a little later alighted opposite a large departmental store on whose plate glass windows the gold letters of "James" glittered in the sunlight.

It was her first visit to the city and the noise, bustle and strangeness, combined with the ever-present thought of the object of her journey, drove the stray gleams of sunlight from her heart as she hesitatingly entered the store.

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The hour was early, but the bargain seekers of the city were already thronging the store, and Maria was scarcely inside before she found herself immersed in this sea of humanity who pushed and jostled her as they pressed towards the various counters.

It was an unexpected experience for the timid little woman from the obscure village, and her heart throbbed tumultuously as she mingled with this stream of eager buyers who forced her to drift aimlessly over the long lines of attractiveness stretched in endless directions.

At one point where the broad aisles crossed she freed herself from the thickest of the throng, and approaching a clerk inquired for the office of "Mr. James."

Directing her to a line of elevators further on, she was whirled a few minutes later to another floor, where she was soon after ushered into a small, richly furnished reception room.

"What name, madame?" brought her to conscious attention.

For a second the question puzzled her, but quickly collecting her thoughts, she nervously unfastened her little netted bag, and taking from it a card bearing her name, she handed it to the clerk, who immediately left the room.

Albert James was in conversation with a caller when the clerk handed him the card. He was speaking in a voice which indicated a curbed and well-disciplined mind, which had in a surprisingly short

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period planned and later achieved the success due to one of the city's chief business houses.

As his eye rested on the card he became for an instant absorbed, but there was no visible change on the clean-shaven face.

When his visitor rose to depart he still held the card, and half absently watched him leave the room.

Crossing slowly to the door of the reception room he turned the handle half reluctantly, and for once the self-assured man of business felt his heart beating with an excess of emotion that strangely jarred the equilibrium of hitherto placid thought.

Opening the door very slowly he entered the room. Maria still sat in her chair, but leaning back with closed eyes. The netted bag and the pocket-book, which she had taken from it, had slipped to the floor. In a second he was at her side and, clasping the little black-gloved hands in his, bent anxiously over the unconscious form.

Late that afternoon, in the drawing-room of one of the suites of a leading hotel, Albert James thrust a soiled pocket-book into the open fire, and clasping the small labor-stained hand of Maria Dale, who rested in an easy chair near by, he reverently kissed it again and again.

"Each day is a fresh beginning, and although I have not seen you for fifteen long years, I have had but the one old love dream—you."

"Wall, that 'Riah Dale wus allers a deep un," Mrs.

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Riggs remarked one day as she stood on the verandah of the general store in conversation with Limpy, who had followed her to the door.

"Neow, I differ with ye theer, Lizzie Riggs, fer if theer be a woman on this here hill who was allers above board, 'n' has a show o' happiness comin' her way, it's 'Riah Dale."

"We air told in the Bible that Jacob waited seven year. Wall, she has waited fer fifteen fer the sign to come thet Albert was innercent, 'n' she did it in a very hefty way, tew, fer o' all the folks in Sunshine-Shadder she has lived in the shadder all them years."

"Yees, that all may be," Mrs. Riggs unwillingly admitted. "She has made her last dress for us, anyways, 'n' although the house is ter be closed up, 'n' some things go ter the swell house in city, 'long with that howling cat, Peter, they be a-comin' ter spend a few weeks here every summer."

"I'm right glad ter hear that," Limpy exclaimed, "fer the hill is thinnin' out fast, aye, thinnin' out fast," he added, half mournfully, as he turned into the store.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHEPHERD OF SUNSHINE-SHADDER.

THE evening service in the red-brick church was drawing to a close. A large congregation had greeted Peter Paul that evening, and an attentive silence had attended his closing words.

"My brethren, would you be as stars shining high and bright in the firmament of glory? Would you receive the ten talents recompense? Oh, then, be not weary in well-doing. Let the world take knowledge that you are a follower of Christ, that you are wearing Christ's livery, bearing Christ's spirit, sharing Christ's cross. Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

"Yon was a gran' discoorse, but the more'n I look at him, Limpy, the more'n I think he's failin'," Billy Batterson remarked as they wended their way home that night.

"Wall, I don't like even ter think o' it," Limpy replied.

"No, nor me, but I hev' had it more or less in my min' last few weeks, 'n' more so sin' Jim Stead be a-tellin' me that his heart most kinked other day as he sat be the bed o' little Nellie Cameron on third line."

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"Wall, Billy, I cain't hardly b'lieve it; of course he's not as young as he uster be, fer he's steppin' towards sixty, same as me 'n' ye, 'n' we all know that he's hed it most rough on this here hill, what with docterin' 'n' preachin' 'n' trampin' over the roads well nigh on thirty years. Blame it all, Billy, I don't know how a cleever doctor o' the body 'n' soul ever stayed on this here hill so long; 'n' twixt me 'n' ye, if it t'wan't fer the fac' that his missus 'n' baby lies on yon bit o' groun', he'd been away ter the city long ere this."

"Theer be a grain o' truth ter that," Billy admitted.

"Yes, 'n' neow, as I didn't get a word with him comin' out o' church, I'll jest climb up 'n' hev' a look at him," he announced as he turned around and, bidding Billy a half-absent good-night, hobbled up the hill again.

Deber Paul had one room in the manse which served the purpose of reception, library and dispensary. It was a small room, simply but cosily furnished. Rows of books, many of them well worn and thumbed, ranged from theological to medical behind the glass doors of a huge book-case which lined the wall in one part of the room.

A modest dispensary and a small cabinet of surgical instruments filled a space between the two windows which commanded an exposure of the hillside and valley. The library table, strewn with books, papers and odds and ends, met the eye on entrance, and opposite it was an open log fire, and near it a com-

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fortable easy chair, in whose depths Peter Paul was reclining on the Sunday evening when Limpy's knock sounded through the quiet house.

Margaret Jenkins, who had undisputed charge of the small household, had opened the door to him, and ushering him into the presence of Peter, returned to her immaculate kingdom at the end of the narrow hall.

"I'm right glad to see you; sit ye down, old friend," Peter exclaimed as he drew a chair to the fire.

"I was just napping while Margaret was making my tea, and now you must join me in a cup and tell me all the news, for I have not been extra the last few days, and have neglected even the weekly paper."

"The rough drives and long tramps are using ye up; ye must go a bit slower," Limpy gently remonstrated as he rested his eyes half ruefully on the small thin man, the whiteness of whose hair and closely cropped beard enhanced the pallor of his face, but did not rob the large grey eyes of the sunlight and shadow reflected in their depths.

"Well, maybe; you know even the horse is bound to give out after years of steady service; and really, after all, it's about time I was slipping off the harness and letting someone fresh and bristling with activity slip into my place. You know, Limpy, the congregation is increasing, and in all likelihood seventh line will be annexed next year, and with a long drive between, you will need a younger man."

"Tut, tut, man, it's a pipe dream ye air havin' when ye think like that, fer ye know that we on this

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here hill 'n' valley would never bide another man as long as ye air able to talk onct in the seven days. I wus jest wonderin' ter Billy the night how we ever kept ye so long."

"Well, when I came here it was but for three weeks, as you know, and it often seems strange to me that I have clung to Sunshine-Shadder for thirty years. John Roblin, now one of the ablest men in the Church, was to have been your man, but at the eleventh hour the old principal sent him to Westerly, and I, welcoming a change, volunteered to come here. Sometimes it seems like yesterday. The last few years had been most strenuous, for, foolish fellow, after I graduated in medicine I took a post-graduate course for three months, and without a breathing space returned to the university and dug in for the ministry. I was never very rugged, but my health held up somehow through the sessions, and when I graduated and got the coveted degree, I went to bed for several long months. I had been burning the candle at both ends, so to speak, and with my parents' death happening the same year, I was glad to escape away from it all out here, to rest and commune with nature."

"Aye, aye, Peter Paul, ye might a-made a big name fer yerself, more 'spicuous, if ye hedna taken the offer ter stay. I 'member well the first night ye came, 'n'most played out ye were, 'n' after ye hed supper ye bunked with me, 'n' real prood I wus ter hev' ye, although ye didna do a thing but tern 'n' toss most o' the night."

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"Yes, Limpy, and after I got into the manse I did the same for many a night. I came here weak and tired and troubled at heart, for the grace of the Father had not filled me as it did a little later. Then I married, and a short year after that I laid my little wife to rest, and after that I was most in, so to speak, but it was then I caught the sympathetic understanding held out to me in the close handclasp and warm heart of the hillside, and somehow I just clung to you after that. Whenever I felt a yearning for a wider scope I simply could not make up my mind to leave the lonely grave, and then my knowledge of medicine formed so many bonds between the sick and myself, even greater than the poor spiritual dose I sometimes give you, that I simply came to feel the hillside and valley was the place for me. As the years creep on I feel it more, for, Limpy, we get like the old tree that cannot bear transplanting."

"The hillside would never be the same again without ye, 'n' yer good fer years yet, man," he brokenly encouraged, as he wiped a suspicious moistness from his eyes and took a cup of tea and a slice of bread and butter from the tray which Margaret had carried into the room.

"To-morrow I will be busy, for I have three sick calls and an operation, beside my visit to Nellie Cameron; poor child, she is past all aid, for tuberculosis had made frightful inroads long before they called me in. Such is life."

"Yees, we air pretty poor affairs when sickness comes, fer although we go to the repair shop 'n' come

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out whole, we air bound ter give out in some new quarter."

"I've never spoken of it, Limpy, but my heart promises to give out some of these bright days. I consulted a specialist when in the city last and we had a plain talk, and I left him feeling that I cannot count on many years; it may be only months; but it don't worry me, old friend, I'm quite prepared to go; it's only the thought of those who might need me, and the love I have for these dear old hills—"

"Don't think on it, man," Limpy protested, as he checked a rising sob and pushing back his chair prepared to leave. Peter Paul followed him to the door, and as Limpy clasped the thin white hand which had through the years relieved much pain and suffering, he mumbled brokenly:

"Forget yer trouble, man Paul; we cain't spare ye yet. You've been both air 'n' light ter us tired souls, made up our homes 'n' helped to warm our hearths, 'n' sometimes—What hev' we done fer ye? Oh, wicked 'n' perverse generation."

The quiet routine of the Sunday following Limpy's chat at the manse was depressingly disturbed by the largest funeral ever seen in Sunshine-Shadder.

As early as the grey dawn of the Sunday morning gigs, single rigs, democrats and unwieldy waggons, packed with the young and old of the district for many miles around, rattled down the zig-zag hill to pay their last tribute to Peter Paul, the bright and guiding star of the hillside, whose brilliancy had sud-

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denly been overshadowed by the grim and sombre cloud of death.

Just a week ago, in the grey dawn of the Sunday morning, he had rattled down the same hill and along the village street and up the winding road to the little tumble-down manse. He had been out all night and away into the early morning on various calls from the sick, and the sleepy hillside was just opening its eyes as the sound of his horse's hoofs were heard. Several winked their eyes to wakefulness and rushed to the window or door to catch a glimpse of the passerby. The picture that met their eyes was of the dapper little doctor of the soul and body who sat as erect as a trooper in his battered, mud-stained buggy drawn by Bess, the old bay mare who had carried him through the storm and sunshine of many a year.

Many of the villagers had seen him again at the morning service, and many of the kiddies had felt the warm pressure of his friendly hand when he had dropped in their midst for a little talk at the closing of the Sunday School. Then at the evening service they had listened to his last message, and throughout that week up to Friday he had flitted among them and past their homes out into the country to heal the sick or comfort the hopeless or bereaved.

Now he had been summoned to give an account of his long stewardship, and the grey dawn of that Sabbath morning stole into every home in Sunshine-Shadder and lingered in the hearts of the simple lives within for many a day.

The morning of the afternoon he had passed away

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he had sent Margaret Jenkins for Limpy Beggs, who had hobbled up to the little manse troubled at heart that his old-time friend had not been able to bear his own message.

He was resting in bed, looking very pale and worn, when Limpy entered the room, and when he reluctantly left him, an hour later, Peter grasped the rugged brown hand and feebly said:

"I'm not long for Sunshine-Shadder now. As I told you before, you will find among my papers in the study the will I made some time ago. Everything I have goes to faithful Margaret, with the exception of a few hundreds for my poor little church. My books, instruments, go to the young doctor who has agreed to take up the work after I'm gone. Just a simple burial, Limpy. No long-winded sermon. Let me rest in the church one night, and before I'm laid away read aloud yourself my favorite twenty-third Psalm."

The call came about five that afternoon. Limpy and Billy Batterson and Margaret and the young doctor, who had been sent for, were in the room.

"Good-bye—boys—Margaret. I hope the valley and the journey-end will be pleasant. Mind, I'll be waitin' sort o' lonesome for you all from Sunshine-Shadder."

He was carried in a very plain casket to the church, where he rested until Sunday. The news of his death spread very quickly the country round, and many a tear was shed and many a sob was heard when it was

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known that the much-loved man of the hillside was dead.

Limpy, who had donned his broadcloth suit for the first time since his marriage, was early at the church. The day was one of the days in the middle of June when the air is soft and warm, and although the church was filled, as many again stood outside the door.

Limpy, in accordance with his promise, ascended the steps of the little worn pulpit, and, scarcely raising his tear-dimmed eyes, commenced the twenty-third Psalm, which he read brokenly to the end. A neighboring clergyman offered a simple prayer, after which the sobbing voices of the congregation closed the service with a few lines of Peter Paul's favorite hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light." Then it was that the last look was taken of the man who had, during his years among them, made his secret mark, leaving at his departure a pleasant impress upon almost every heart.

The casket, covered with garden and wild flowers, was sealed, and loving hands bore it from the church and laid it beside the small grave of his nearest and dearest, to be guarded over by the wide branches of the red-berried rowan tree planted there by himself many years before. The groups under the trees and about the grave stole silently and tearfully away to their homes, thinking, many of them, as to who would carry the banner he had laid down after a well-fought fight in the hills and dales of Sunshine-Shadder.

